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KAUFMAN COUNTY IN THE CIVIL WAR

by Jack Stoltz

When the decade of the 1860s opened, all America was apprehensive about the events that loomed on the horizon. The feelings of distrust between North and South had become fraught with meanness. The fear for future relations between the two sides permeated every part of the nation, even to the remote communities of Kaufman County, so far from the center of national political activity. When Abraham Lincoln won the presidency of the United States in November 1860, the die was cast. Most Southerners were determined that secession was their only recourse.

Within a month of the election, Texas leaders called for a secession convention. In early January 1861, Isham Chism was elected to represent Kaufman County at that convention, and on January 28 the convention assembled in Austin. On February 1 a resolution of secession was adopted and sent to the people for ratification. There were citizens in the state who strongly opposed such action, but the statewide vote on February 23 was overwhelmingly in favor of leaving the Union. The citizens of Kaufman County voted in favor 461 ayes to 155 nays, a three to one margin. When the convention re-assembled after the balloting, William Nash replaced Chism as the delegate from Kaufman County.¹

Even before the final vote for secession had been taken, the commissioner's court took its first step to prepare to deal with potential problems and to insure domestic tranquility. In the county at the time there were over 500 slaves, certainly enough to create tension. The entire nation was in turmoil over the issue of slavery, and agitators roamed the countryside ready to espouse the cause of freedom. On February 21 the court ordered the creation of patrol detachments in each of the precincts "to patrol the negroes."

Listed below is the manpower originally assigned to the eight detachments of the county. While the personnel changed every few months, the organizations and their missions continued throughout the war:²

Detachment no. 1, precinct no. 1: J.P. Barnett, captain. Privates: Jas Truett, A. Corder, Larry Clark, Rufus Lucky, J.P. Miller.

Detachment no. 2, precinct no. 2: D. Murphy, captain. Privates: W.B. Dashiell, J.A. Wad, Lafayette Murphy.

Detachment no. 3, precinct no. 3: L.T. Nash, captain. Privates: Wm. D. Irvine, D. Moore, A.L. Gardner, Jas. Barnett, N.B. Nash.

Detachment no. 4, precinct no. 4: J.E. Crouch, captain. Privates: L.W. Lyde, J.A. Shaw, C.J. Fox, A.J. Barnett, John Buie.

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Detachment no. 5, precinct no. 5: J.J. Rogers, captain. Privates: Jas. Johnson, Andrew Henry, C.J. Terrell.

Detachment no. 6, precinct no. 6: J.C. McCorquadale, captain. Privates: T.P. Carlisle, John Erwin, N.H. Parish, K. McKinney, T.M. Hoffman.

Detachment no. 7, precinct no. 7: F.A. Massey, captain. Privates: James Daugherty, M.T. Stephenson, Jonathan Pyle, W.T. Stubbs, Sam Pyle.

Detachment no. 8, precinct no. 8: Thos. C. Griffin, captain. Privates: Isaac Houston, F.A. Waters, Sam Stiles.

The first Kaufman County military unit enrolled was Captain John R. Briscoe's company from precinct one, the Rockwall-Heath area, enrolled on May 8, 1861. Listed as officers of the unit were 1st Lt. Arthur Corder, 2nd Lt. A.T. Lancaster, 3rd Lt. Feepee Starks, and 4th Lt. J.H.B. Jones. Completing the complement of the company were eight non-commissioned officers and eighty-three privates.³

At least eighteen companies were recruited from Kaufman County from mid-1861 through 1864. Some of these units saw violent action on distant battlefields, while some were recruited for the local militia or home guard.

One of the major objectives of the Confederate government in the early days of the war was to secure the western regions, the land beyond the Mississippi River, for the Confederacy. Troops from Kaufman County played a prominent part in this early campaign. The 3rd Texas Cavalry Regiment was organized in Dallas on June 13, 1861, with Colonel Elkanah Greer as commander. Known as Greer's Regiment, it included among its ten companies that of Captain Isham Chism's Company F from Kaufman County. The regiment arrived at Fort Smith, Arkansas, in July where it joined forces with General Ben McCulloch in engagements in Missouri, Indian Territory, and Arkansas. It participated in the battle of Pea Ridge, or Elkhorn Tavern, in Arkansas on March 7, 1862, when General McCulloch was killed in action. Soon after, it was transferred to Corinth, Mississippi, to reinforce Confederate troops fighting there. In November it became a part of the newly formed Ross' Brigade.⁴

All the while, the boys of Greer's Regiment were well reminded that they were not forgotten by the folks back home. On September 12, 1861, the commissioners ordered \$300, or as much thereof as necessary, be drawn to furnish clothing, blankets, and other needs to the boys of Greer's Regiment serving in Missouri. J.C. Burge was reimbursed \$100 for delivering these supplies. In February 1862, James Thompson and John Stephenson were paid \$185 for making another delivery to the regiment.⁵

The 6th Texas Cavalry Regiment was also organized in Dallas, on September 6, 1861. Colonel B. Warren Stone was elected commander of the regiment with a staff composed of Lt. Col. John S. Griffith, Major L.S. Ross, and with Lt. D.R. Gurley as the adjutant. Among the ten

companies in this regiment were included Company A, Kaufman County, Captain A.J. Hardin; Company B, Kaufman County, commanded by Lt. Col. Griffith; and Company E, Van Zandt County, Captain Jack Wharton. This last company was known to have included in its ranks recruits from Kaufman, Van Zandt, and Henderson counties.

The 6th Cavalry joined General Ben McCulloch on the western front in time to participate in the engagements in Indian Territory in the winter of 1861-62, and saw action at Elkhorn Tavern on March 7, 1862. Following this engagement, it too was moved east of the Mississippi River to support the Confederate forces around Corinth. Like the 3rd Cavalry, the 6th became a part of Ross' Brigade in November 1862.⁶

When Ross' Brigade was first organized it was commanded by Colonel J.W. Whitfield of the 27th Texas Cavalry, Whitfield's Legion, except for periods of Whitfield's absence due to illness when it was commanded by Lt. Col. Griffith. Its most notable expedition of this period was the raid on Holly Springs, Mississippi, in December 1862. As the result of this action the brigade captured a large number of prisoners and large stores and ammunition. This defeat for the Union forced General U.S. Grant to abandon this route in his attack on Vicksburg.⁷

Soon after the Battle of Holly Springs, Griffith resigned his commission because of ill health, and returned to Rockwall where he was elected to the Texas legislature. On March 1, 1864, Governor Pendleton Murrah appointed him a brigadier general of Texas State Troops.

Another of the county's military units formed in early 1861 was commanded by H.W. Kyser. The company was formed on June 15, 1861, with 1st Lt. G.W. Graves, 2nd Lt. J.M. Kinchen, 3rd Lt. J.C. Burge, and a complement of eighty-eight men.

According to a biographical sketch written about Captain Kyser many years later, his company was not called into active service for several months and became a familiar sight as his men were drilled on the streets of Kaufman. Finally, in October 1861, the unit was called to active duty as Company G, Parson's Regiment, when that command was organized in Ellis County in early October.⁸ At the time it was mustered into service it carried a new complement of officers: 1st Lt. Ovid Van Pool, 2nd Lt. A.T. Wilson, 3rd Lt. H.H. Sowell, and with ten non-commissioned officers and sixty-four privates.

At the February 1863 term of the commissioners' court, Captain H.W. Keyser was allowed \$275 for knives for use of Company G, Parson's Regiment.⁹

Parson's Brigade, as it has become popularly known, was commanded by Colonel W.H. Parson. His brigade served throughout the war west of the Mississippi River from Missouri to Louisiana. It played a prominent part in the defeat of the Union forces under General N.P. Banks in the Red River campaign. Major Robert A. Terrell, for whom the city

of Terrell was named, served as quartermaster of the brigade from its formation until the war's end.

Still another combat unit came out of Kaufman County. Captain Dubart Murphy, one of the early settlers of the county and a highly respected citizen of the area, was asked to raise a company in support of Colonel Nathaniel M. Burford's 19th Texas Cavalry Regiment, a part of Parson's Brigade. He succeeded in recruiting the full complement and served as captain of the unit for seven months. When he resigned in late 1862 because of advanced age, the command was assumed by a Lieutenant Michaux.¹⁰

Of numerous other companies organized in Kaufman County in those war years, no record has been found that any saw action in combat. All were listed as part of the 13th Brigade, Texas State Troops. They served as part of the state militia, or home guard, an essential service at a time when invasion by enemy forces was a threat. They include:

1. Captain Thomas P. Andrews, unit mustered at Post Oak Grand, June 29, 1861;
2. Captain J.B. Bounds, precinct 2, organized 1862;
3. Captain J.C. Burge, precinct 3, organized 1862;
4. Captain Embrey Cannon, precinct 1, organized 1862;
5. Captain J.M. Garner, Reserve Company, Beat no. 9, organized 1861;
6. Captain John R. Johnson, Prairieville Company, precinct 6, organized 1861;
7. Captain A.K. McDonald, Liberty Home Guards, precinct 4, organized 1861;
8. Captain J.J. Richardson, precinct 5, organized 1861;
9. Captain A.M.K. Sowell, Mustang Rangers Cavalry Company, organized 1861;
10. Captain Ovid Van Pool, Trinity Guards, Reserve Cavalry Company, organized 1861.¹¹

One of the vital services demanded of the Confederacy as early as the mid-part of 1861 was the establishment of a postal system to replace the service that the United States had been providing. The man Jefferson Davis chose as Postmaster General was John H. Reagan, a Kaufman County pioneer.¹²

In the county the organization of the postal system seemed simple. At the beginning of 1860 there had been ten post offices in the county, but one at College Mound had been discontinued in September, long before the breakup of the Union. The Confederate government discontinued one small office at Cedar Fork, in the vicinity of the present-day Hiram, and left the remaining eight offices intact, four without a change in postmasters:¹³

CEDAR GROVE	W.C. Malone	28 Dec. 1861
KAUFMAN	* J.R. Wilson	6 Aug. 1861
	B.J. Osborn	1 Feb. 1865
KEMP	Richd O. Watkins	12 Nov. 1861
PRAIRIEVILLE	Jno. R. Johnson	5 Aug. 1861
ROCK WALL	* Frank Sullivan	18 Jul. 1861
STOVER'S CROSS ROADS	* L.D. Stover	12 Jul. 1861
TRINIDAD	* P.H. Anthony	17 Jan. 1862
	J.S. Dameron	13 Dec. 1864
TURNER'S POINT	W.W. Royel	31 Jan. 1862

While Kaufman County's young men were marching off to war, life changed at home as well. Older men took on responsibilities that had shifted to younger shoulders. Farms and homes were run by women without the support of husbands and older sons. Although most women of that day had been accustomed to hard work, they soon found duties to perform they had never faced alone.

The concern of everyone in the first months of the war was the support for the men in service. In August 1862, the commissioners' court authorized an additional \$1200 for delivery of supplies to "Kaufman County soldiers serving in the C.S.A." In 1863 an order was issued for supplies to be sent to men in Burford's and Parson's regiments.

The citizens of the county realized that there was another need to be faced that was to be equally as critical as supplying the soldiers on distant battlefields. There were families at home in need of assistance.

The commissioners' minutes contain the names of women in all precincts of the county who were indigent, or at least in need of oversight by official visitors assigned by the court. The complete list gave a total of 119 families in the category of potential need. The census of Kaufman County for 1860 had listed 612 total households; before the war's end one household in five was in need of assistance.

On August 21, 1862, pursuant to authorization of the legislature, approved December 19, 1861, the court took the following action:

Ordered by the court that the amount of ten thousand dollars be immediately issued in treasury bonds or warrants for war purposes and for the benefit of the destitute families of persons who have been, are now, or may hereafter be enrolled in the Army or Navy of the state or Confederate service from the county of Kaufman, subject to the discretion of the court.¹⁴

In December a committee was appointed to visit homes in the various precincts to ascertain the needs and authorize delivery of necessary supplies immediately. A report showed a total of \$648.60 in immediate assistance was delivered to the needy families.

In February 1863, term of court it was further ordered that:

The visitors of the indigent soldier families are hereby instructed to

make inquiry in their respective precincts of all those soldiers' families who will require assistance in harvesting the next season, and it be their further duty to advertise and procure hands for the same who shall be paid out of the wheat and corn, and it is further ordered that reasonable compensation shall be allowed to such visitors and their services rendered.¹⁵

In that same term the assessor-collector of taxes was ordered to assess and collect a county war tax of 25¢ on each \$100 worth of taxable property.

Throughout the 1863 the minutes of the commissioners' court draw a vivid picture of the concerns of the citizens of the county. The war was in its third year, and the price of every victory and defeat was beginning to fall heavily on families back home:

... Hugh McCorkle allowed \$130 for one bale of cotton for the use of soldiers families ... Also to purchase ten bales at the price of 2/lb ... An appropriation of sixteen hundred, or so much as may be necessary to cover the expenses in the purchase of 113 Jr. cotton cards at \$10 per Jr. and 100 lbs. of powder and an equivalent proportion of lead and percussion caps ... The price of the cloth to be issued to the indigent families is hereby fixed at 56½ cents to those families without negroes and 86½ to those families having negroes, per yard ... W.D. Irvine, chief justice, authorized a trip to Huntsville to draw cotton cards from penitentiary ... The visitors of the necessities of the families in this county are authorized to procure proper houses for the deposit of wheat and corn purchased for the use of said families ... Chief justice authorized to borrow as much money as may be needed for purpose of paying for grain required for support of indigent families.¹⁶

Conditions throughout the Confederacy were deteriorating by the beginning of 1864, and the story of that decline can be told in the conditions in Kaufman County. People there realized that the physical destruction caused by the Union armies was far distant from their homes in Texas, and this was a blessing not to be forgotten in their daily prayers, but the pressures of wartime conditions created hardship nonetheless.

In February 1864, a ration of ammunition for home use was received and ordered distributed on the basis of one half box of caps and one pound of lead or shot per family. The caps were to be sold at \$4 a box, lead at 50¢ a pound, and the shot at \$1 a pound.¹⁷

In June the county treasurer was ordered to exchange all non-interest bearing \$100 bills then in the treasury, or that may be in the treasury on the last day of June, for four percent Confederate bonds, and that the bonds were to be receivable from the treasurer at par for the amount of the bonds.¹⁸ On July 1 the treasurer reported \$15,500 in Confederate bonds were on hand in the treasury and that out of \$10,079 in county script that had been issued, \$9771 was still in circulation.¹⁹

In November, C.C. Nash was appointed by the court to deposit with proper authorities in Dallas all the Confederate money of the "old issue"

then on hand belonging to the county for the purpose of having the same exchanged for the new issue.²⁰

On January 6, 1865, the taxes in the county became even more oppressive:

Ordered a tax of $\frac{1}{2}$ of 1% to be levied on all property in Kaufman County subject to taxation, including a license tax and tax on merchandise as shown on assessment rolls for 1864, and said tax to be collected in specie or in Confederate money of the new issue at 15 for 1 in specie, or in state treasury warrants at 10 for 1 in specie.²¹

In a gesture of desperation on April 4, 1865, the assessor-collector was authorized to receive state treasury warrants at 25¢ on the dollar in payment of the special specie tax.²² Within a few days General Robert E. Lee surrendered at Appomatox and the total Confederate structure collapsed soon afterward.

There was one magnificent gesture on the part of the citizens of Kaufman County in these final tragic weeks. In January 1865, agents were appointed by the court with authority to accept farm produce in payment of taxes in sufficient quantities to serve the needs of the families under the county's care. Prices as specified in the purchases were listed as follows: corn, \$1.00 per bushel; corn meal, \$1.00 per bushel; wheat, \$1.50 per bushel; flour, 5¢ per pound; pork, 5¢ per pound; and bacon, 10¢ per pound.²³

The duties of the agents authorized to purchase for the benefit of indigent families were given these additional instructions:

The said agents are hereby prohibited from purchasing more firewood than is absolutely necessary for the use of the families in his precinct, which must be delivered by the taxpayer at such place or places as said agent may designate, said wood to be paid for at the rates hereafter mentioned:

For one mile, \$1.00 a load; less than a mile, 75¢ a load; for each additional mile, 50¢ to be added thereto. The loads of wood are understood to be fair average loads for one yoke of steers or two horses.

It is further ordered that said agents may purchase beef in case of necessity, but in no case more than is absolutely necessary, said beef to be paid for at the rate of 2½¢ for forequarter and 3¢ for hindquarter.²⁴

How many men did Kaufman County send to fight in that tragic war within the Union? How many were buried on alien soil in unmarked graves? And how many succeeded in returning to loved ones to continue their lives in the peace and security of their own firesides? No one knows. In front of the courthouse in Kaufman is a monument to those who fought in the war. Few who pass there today take the time to notice, but the inscription engraved on its base expresses the appreciation and admiration of a generation that could not forget all they had done and endured so many years ago.

Erected to the memory of the Confederate soldiers by the people of Kaufman County.

Honor to their memory, glory to their cause and peace to their ashes.

They went down to battle at the command of their state, and fought for their constitution, homes and firesides.

No soldiers ever fought more bravely on the field nor suffered greater for their country.

NOTES

¹*Journal of the Secession Convention 1861*, E.M. Winkler, (ed.), (Austin, 1912), p. 408.

²Commissioners' Minutes, 1, pp. 46, 47.

³Robert R. Butler, *History of Kaufman County*, (Master's thesis, University of Texas, 1940), p. 47. The U.S. Census for Kaufman County, 1860, lists Tempe Starke as a resident. Perhaps this is a more accurate spelling of the name of Captain Briscoe's third lieutenant.

⁴Dudley G. Wooten, *A Comprehensive History of Texas 1685-1897*, II, (Dallas, 1898), pp. 614-616.

⁵Commissioners' Minutes, 1, pp. 76, 77, 92.

⁶Wooten, *Comprehensive History*, pp. 616-617.

⁷Wooten, *Comprehensive History*, pp. 619-620.

⁸*Terrell Times-Star*, November 22, 1890.

⁹Commissioners' Minutes, 1, p. 143.

¹⁰Frank W. Johnson, *A History of Texas and Texans*, 4 (Chicago, 1914), p. 1671.

¹¹*Texas Confederate Military Service Records*, reel no. 1, parts 1 and 2, Dallas Public Library.

¹²John H. Reagan was a surveyor, military scout, land owner, and politician in Kaufman County before finally settling in Anderson County.

¹³Grover C. Ramsey, *Confederate Postmasters in Texas 1861-1865*, (Waco, 1963), Statewide alphabetical listing, unnumbered pages.

¹⁴Commissioners' Minutes, 1, p. 124.

¹⁵Commissioners' Minutes, 1, p. 160.

¹⁶Commissioners' Minutes, 1, pp. 164-187.

¹⁷Commissioners' Minutes, 1, p. 198.

¹⁸Commissioners' Minutes, 1, p. 221.

¹⁹Commissioners' Minutes, 1, p. 225.

²⁰Commissioners' Minutes, 1, p. 239.

²¹Commissioners' Minutes, 1, p. 249.

²²Commissioners' Minutes, 1, p. 255.

²³Commissioners' Minutes, 1, p. 250.

²⁴Commissioners' Minutes, 1, p. 250.